

Michigan
Department
of Human
Services

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Articles in Today's Clips

Thursday, May 8, 2008

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May 8, 2008

Baby dies; man could face charge of murder

Police say caregiver, 21, could be arraigned today

Kevin Grasha
Lansing State Journal

Police say the 21-year-old male caregiver for a young child who died Wednesday could face murder charges.

The 13-month-old girl was rushed to Sparrow Hospital on Tuesday after a man called 911 and said the girl had fallen and was not breathing, Lansing police Lt. Dave Nosotti said. Police are investigating the death as a homicide.

The child initially was listed in critical condition.

The incident occurred in a house in the 700 block of Quaker Court, police said.

The caregiver, whom authorities did not identify because he has not been charged, is in police custody.

He could be arraigned as early as today, Nosotti said.

Neighbor Stephanie Johnson said a nearby resident told her the suspect claimed "he had just stepped outside for a minute when the baby fell off the couch."

The family moved in less than a month ago, and Johnson said she did not know them.

"They didn't even live here long enough to know them," she said.

The small house is one of six nearly identical homes on the street, which is off East Saginaw.

No one answered the door Wednesday afternoon.

Nosotti would not provide details about what investigators believe happened.

He also would not describe the child's injuries.

"It's obviously a very complex investigation," he said. "I don't want to release details that might compromise the prosecution of this case."

Contact Kevin Grasha at 267-1347 or kgrasha@lsj.com.



First baby of '08 dies

Wednesday, May 07, 2008

JILL ARMENTROUT

THE SAGINAW NEWS

Pricilla Jean Heft of Thomas Township, the first baby born in Saginaw County this year, lived for four months.

The infant died early Sunday when a family member lying next to her on a couch rolled over and suffocated her, Thomas Township Police Chief Steven D. Kocsis said.

The daughter of Edward E. Heft and Ashlee Kinville, Pricilla joined a sister and two brothers when she was born at Covenant Medical Center Harrison on Jan. 1. She died at the hospital.

Department of Human Services Children Protective Service workers removed the three siblings from the home that Heft and Kinville share, Kocsis said, adding that he didn't know where they are staying.

The Saginaw County Sheriff's Department and Thomas Township police will send a report to County Prosecutor Michael D. Thomas' office, Kocsis said.

"We investigate any death like this, particularly with an infant. We look at it closely," Kocsis said. "The prosecutor will decide if it was criminal negligence or truly an accident. It's a tragedy either way."

Officers and detectives were completing their reports and will send them to the prosecutor's office in the next day or two, Kocsis said Tuesday.

"This is the first time we've had an infant suffocation death in the 18 years I've been chief of this department," he said.

Pricilla Heft's great uncle, Robert G. Heft, is the Thomas Township resident who designed the 50-star American flag.

Her funeral was to start at 11 a.m. today at Wakeman Funeral Home, 1218 N. Michigan in Saginaw.

There were 18 infant deaths in Saginaw County in 2006 out of 2,550 live births. The county's Fetal Infant Mortality Review team analyzes all cases of children who die before their first birthday. Data for 2007 aren't yet available.

The No. 1 cause of these deaths in 2006 was accidental suffocation, either under a blanket or because someone rolled onto the baby, said Dawn Shanafelt, community health supervisor at the Saginaw County Department of Public Health, who coordinates the review team.

The number of infant deaths from accidental suffocation or strangulation jumped 210 percent statewide from 1990 to 2001, the annual Child Deaths in Michigan report shows.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says unintentional suffocation was the leading cause of fatal injury to infants nationwide during the past 20 years.

The Michigan Department of Community Health recently launched an Infant Safe Sleep campaign, including brochures with this warning:

"Babies are dying because they are put to sleep in places that are not safe. Babies always need a safe sleep place."

Parents whose babies have died offered these tips:

t Babies are not safe sleeping on a couch, pillow or anything soft.

t Babies are not safe sleeping with other children, adults or pets.

t Adult beds are not safe for babies. If you feed your baby in bed, put your baby back into a crib to sleep. v

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May 8, 2008

Boy hurt in ATV accident released from Flint hospital

Times Herald

A 2-year-old boy from Port Huron who was hurt in an ATV accident in Charlevoix County's Wilson Township has been released from Hurley Medical Center in Flint.

Sutton Andrew Majeske was operating a child-sized Suzuki four-wheeler on Sunday at the home when the small ATV went over a cellar embankment and crashed.

Sutton suffered a broken jaw and cuts to his face. Originally admitted in critical condition, he was upgraded to fair on Tuesday and has been released.

The Charlevoix County Prosecutor's Office had been investigating the incident to determine if criminal charges were appropriate.

The office determined it was not appropriate to press criminal charges against the family, said Shaynee Fanara, chief assistant prosecutor.

She said it appears the boy jumped on the small ATV without the knowledge of his parents. It seems the boy learned how to operate the toy by observing others riding it.

He hopped aboard and without permission or authority, started the toy and began to drive it, she said.

"In this particular case, it doesn't appear there was any type of criminal activity or neglect," she said. "It's just an unfortunate accident."



Thursday, May 8, 2008

GOP bills seek to bolster state foster care

Proposal touts advisory panel to facilitate help from public and private sector for strained system.

Tim Martin / Associated Press

LANSING -- Michigan's strained foster care system might get some support from the private sector under a plan soon to be introduced in the state Legislature.

The bills outlined this week by two Republican lawmakers would create a state foster care advisory board to propose improvements and help educate people about how they can help support the system.

The panel also would help foster children who are getting older and soon will be on their own without family support to transition out of the system.

The plan would create a trust fund that would be supported by charitable donations, including a checkoff option on state income tax forms.

Department of Human Services spokeswoman Maureen Sorbet said lawmakers Tuesday shared the concept with department representatives last week, and they are willing to look at the proposal.

Last month, the Department of Human Services announced a task force of more than 60 members aimed at improving Michigan child welfare systems including protective services, adoption, juvenile justice and foster care. The plan discussed Tuesday is more narrowly tailored to foster care.

"A goal is to educate the public on the various ways to serve in foster care," said Rep. Craig DeRoche of Novi, the House's highest-ranking Republican and a supporter of the upcoming legislation. "These proposals are simply a way to get more external support for the system."

The state has 6,611 licensed foster homes. Agencies want to recruit more foster parents. But there are other ways the public can help the foster care system, lawmakers said.

The advisory panel -- whose members would include leaders of various state departments and the chief justice of the Michigan Supreme Court -- would help identify and promote those options.

The state typically has had between 18,000 and 19,000 children in the foster care system at any one time in the past decade.

Several efforts have been made over the years to try to help the state's foster care system. Republicans who are introducing the latest proposals say the measures aren't political, and they commended efforts already under way to improve the system from the administration of Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm. A Democratic lawmaker, Rep. Dudley Spade of Tipton, will sponsor one of the upcoming bills.

Lawmakers said the foster care issue has become so overwhelming that the private sector must be tapped to help.

"Many have wisdom and insight on how to improve the system," said Sen. Bill Hardiman, R-Kentwood, vice chairman of the Senate Families and Human Services Committee. "Working together, we will be able to do that."

Find this article at:

<http://www.detroitnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080508/POLITICS/805080337>

☐ Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

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State foster care could get boost Republican lawmakers call for support from private sector

BY TIM MARTIN • ASSOCIATED PRESS • MAY 8, 2008

LANSING -- Michigan's strained foster care system might get some support from the private sector under a plan soon to be introduced in the state Legislature.

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May 7, 2008

COMMITTEE DEBATES JOINT CUSTODY MANDATE

A bill that would require joint custody of children between two parents, unless one of them is unfit, unwilling to care for the child or they can't maintain a child's school schedule, was the focus of intense debate before the House Judiciary Committee on Wednesday.

[Rep. Glenn Steil Jr.](#) (R-Cascade Twp.), sponsor of [HB 4564](#), said in determining custody, Michigan courts look at 12 factors regarding the child's interest. But that system has "created an environment favoring the mother. "The fact is that children need both parents," he said, adding that studies show that children with two actively involved parents have better self-esteem, do better in school and are less likely to get into trouble with the law.

Supporters of the bill, including the Family Rights Coalition, National Family Justice Association, DADS of Michigan, MOMS of Michigan, and American Coalition for Fathers and Children, said the legislation is needed for multiple reasons.

They said the bill provides a stopgap for a predominance of broken families and ensure children bond with both parents, brings the state in line with U.S. Supreme Court rulings regarding equal protection and saves taxpayer dollars by effecting child support compliance and reducing the likelihood kids will end up in jail.

"The Constitution of the United States provides that people should not be discriminated based on sex. Yet, more than 88 percent of the custody awards in Michigan are to one gender, regardless of being a fit parent and the ability to serve the best interests of the children. Your statistics prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the judicial process is unable to promote the welfare of children and the promotion of family," said James Semerad, chairman of DADS of Michigan.

But Kent Weichmann, representing the Family Law Section of the State Bar of Michigan, argued in opposition to the bill, saying the current custody

determination takes the best interests of the children into consideration and the bill would instead "treat children like objects."

Mr. Weichmann said the bill wouldn't allow the courts to review situations like if the back and forth between parents meant a child's grades or their emotional state was suffering, or if a parent was disparaging the other parent during the child's visit, or if one of the parents married a pedophile.

"You can go on and on," he said of the matters barred from consideration under a joint custody mandate.

He added that in many cases where parents agree to joint custody, the set-up is never a 50-50 split. And Mr. Weichmann said he didn't believe joint custody is required under constitutional rulings by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Opposing the bill, a mental health therapist said people struggling with substance abuse may not always show that they need treatment and aren't necessarily ready to care for a child alone until they've recovered.

And Kathy Hagenian with the Michigan Coalition Against Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence said batterers will use the mandate as a tool to threaten or intimidate their former partner. She said the current system allows for disputes regarding child custody to bring up issues of violence in the home.

The committee did not take a vote on the bill, but chair [Rep. Paul Condino](#) (D-Southfield) said there would be time in the future for more people to testify on the legislation.

The panel will likely take up at least one amendment to the bill dealing with parents convicted of sexual assault. [Rep. Mark Meadows](#) (D-East Lansing) said as the legislation is crafted, he believes it would impose the mandate even if the parent sexually abused their own child. [Rep. Rick Jones](#) (R-Grand Ledge) said social service workers have told him that some judges have granted custody to parents with a sexual assault conviction and he also wants the bill amended to deal with that issue.

Girl pleads not guilty in grandmother's poisoning; hearings to begin next month

By Dennis Pelham
Adrian Daily Telegram

Wed May 07, 2008, 09:14 PM EDT

ADRIAN, Mich. -

A not-guilty plea was entered Wednesday in Lenawee County Probate Court by a 15-year-old girl accused of poisoning her grandmother at their Rollin Township home in 2006.

A June 5 hearing date for Kristina Lynn Adkins was set by Judge Margaret M.S. Noe. Adkins was returned without bond to the Maurice Spear Campus, where she has been held since Nov. 28, several weeks before she was charged with killing Virginia Bentley, 53. According to an autopsy report, Bentley died Aug. 1, 2006, of an allergic reaction to morphine sulfate. The prescription drug was used by her husband as part of his treatment for cancer.

Noe granted a request Wednesday by Virginia Bentley's parents for supervised visits with Adkins. The girl has been allowed visits only with her guardians, Robert and Sarah Rupert of Carleton, since she was taken into custody more than five months ago.

Sarah Rupert, the younger sister of Virginia Bentley, has been critical of the investigation and court process.

A division among family members over the case has widened during the long wait for evidence to be made public.

Virginia Bentley's husband, Ireland "Buzz" Bentley, said last week he is convinced Adkins deliberately put his morphine pills into capsules for a medication his wife was taking. Although she gave a written confession, he said, Adkins showed no remorse during a brief courtroom appearance last

week where a preliminary hearing was waived.

No motive has been explained to him, Buzz Bentley said, but he believes Adkins was upset that his wife planned to take her out of school that fall and provide home schooling for her and her sister.

Court-appointed defense attorney Michael McFarland said Wednesday he will also ask the court to throw out statements Adkins allegedly made while held at the Maurice Spear Campus and questioned by Lenawee County sheriff's detectives about her grandmother's death. He also intends to file a motion for an independent psychological evaluation of Adkins for the June 5 hearing. She was ruled competent to stand trial in March after an evaluation by a state psychologist.

An independent medical expert might also be requested to go over autopsy reports, McFarland said.

Sarah Rupert said she is encouraged that her parents are being allowed to visit Adkins. She said she is also eager for a meeting McFarland scheduled with her and her husband next week. She has complained they are being kept in the dark about evidence in the case and court proceedings. They are not allowed to discuss the case with Adkins during supervised visits, she said.

Sarah Rupert said her sister and Adkins were very close and she can think of no motive for the girl to commit murder.

She disputed Buzz Bentley's theory she was upset at the idea of being home schooled. When she obtained custody of the girl several months after her sister's death, she said, Adkins did not want to go to school.

"When she asked me to be home schooled I said absolutely not," she said. Both Adkins and her sister were identified as emotionally impaired by school officials and placed in self-contained classrooms, she said. The older girl has turned around failing grades and obeys strict attendance rules, Sarah Rupert said, adding she missed 86 days of school in the year before she gained custody of her.

Sarah Rupert said she had detailed school records for both girls when they were called to a hearing in Lenawee County Probate Court on Nov. 28 for alleged attendance problems.

She said Noe refused to look at documents she brought and ordered both girls taken into custody and held at the Maurice Spear Campus. They were then questioned about their grandmother's death, she said. The older girl was not returned home until January, she said, and has consistently stated knew nothing about her grandparents' medications being mixed.

Sarah Rupert said she is still troubled by what she believes was a pretext to have the girls locked up for questioning in the investigation of Virginia Bentley's murder without family members or an attorney involved.

"She was my sister and I want to know what happened, but not to have things done incorrectly," Sarah Rupert said.

Detroit Free Press

Oakland County news briefs

MAY 8, 2008

TROY: June 12 hearing set for ex-mayor

Former Troy Mayor Matt Pryor faces a June 12 pretrial hearing on domestic violence charges.

Pryor was arraigned Monday in 52-4 District Court on a charge stemming from an incident Sunday involving his wife, according to police and court officials.

He was released Monday on a \$2,500 personal bond.

Troy Lt. Gerald Scherlick said police received a call from Pryor's wife after Pryor left their Troy home. She accused her husband of assault. Pryor also called police and said that his wife had assaulted him. After Pryor returned home, police went to the house, took statements and arrested him.

Pryor served as mayor from 2001 to 2004 but was defeated in 2004 by Mayor Louise Schilling.



Muskegon Chronicle

Son arraigned in assault of woman, 76

Thursday, May 08, 2008

By Lisa Medendorp

lmedendorp@muskegonchronicle.com

MUSKEGON -- Bail was set at \$700,000 Wednesday for a 45-year-old Muskegon man accused of seriously injuring his mother during an assault.

Clark Alan Cummings was arraigned before 60th District Judge Michael J. Nolan on a charge of assault with intent to do great bodily harm less than murder. The offense is a 10-year felony.

His mother, Gwendolyn Cummings, 76, was found Monday morning lying on the front enclosed porch of her home at 1346 Spring.

Muskegon police said she appeared to have serious facial injuries and she was taken to Mercy General Health Partners Hackley Campus.

"We haven't been able to interview her," said Detective Sgt. Monica Shirey. Police said the victim was in the hospital's intensive care unit Wednesday. The hospital has not released any information about her.

Mother and son were seen and heard having a loud argument Sunday afternoon, according to police, and the son appeared to be intoxicated at the time.

A man going through the neighborhood in search of salvage cars to buy went to the door of the Cummings residence about 10:41 a.m. Monday, found the elderly woman and called 911. Police discovered signs of a struggle in the dining room, kitchen and front porch.

According to the court file, Clark Cummings is unemployed and lives with his mother.

Clark Cummings has been charged as a habitual offender, which could lengthen any prison sentence he receives if convicted. His court file shows prior convictions for attempted resisting and obstructing police and attempted first-degree retail fraud.

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May 8, 2008

Eva's Place thins budget shortfall

Residents' generosity helps raise \$23,000 for shelter

By NICOLE GERRING
Times Herald

Since announcing a \$30,000 budget shortfall in March, Eva's Place has been able to collect about \$23,000 from community members.

A number of fund-raisers, such as the Flamingo Fling in mid-April, a gold party on May 3 and a flower sale, have raised several thousand of those dollars, said Sherri Lanctot, chairwoman of fund-raising for the Sanilac Area Violence Elimination Council, which oversees the shelter.

The shelter provides emergency services for women and girls who are victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and homelessness.

"Our Sanilac County citizens have been great about helping us," Lanctot said. "The way things are here, I didn't expect people to have the extra money to help Eva's place this year. It's amazing to me how they have stepped forward and supported our project so far and come through when times are really tough."

Officials at the Sanilac Area Violence Elimination Council said earlier this year that they may have to close the doors to Eva's Place if money could not be found to reach the shelter's \$125,000 annual budget. That's looking less and less likely as donations roll in.

The next closest shelters are the Assault/Crisis Center in Caro and shelters in Port Huron, such as Safe Horizons.

More fund-raisers are in the works, Lanctot said.

Eva's Place will sell flowers at the Sanilac County Fairgrounds on Friday. Officials at the shelter also are encouraging area residents to set aside \$1 a day for 100 days and make a donation.

Lanctot said officials are hoping to involve 100 people in that effort and are marketing it to women this month as a worthwhile Mother's Day gift.

Rick Currie, a master goldsmith from Port Huron whose company donated \$1,000 to the shelter after a gold party earlier this month, said the shelter serves an important role.

"There's a lot of poverty in Sanilac County, and many women are trapped in difficult situations with their children," he said.

Because of a lack of economic opportunity, "a lot of those women and their children don't have a choice, and Eva's gives them a choice," he said.



Muskegon Chronicle

Couple charged with stealing from relative

Thursday, May 08, 2008

FROM LOCAL REPORTS

MUSKEGON COUNTY -- A Muskegon Heights couple has been charged with stealing thousands of dollars from a vulnerable relative they were caring for.

Aaron Alexander, 52, and his wife, Darlene Douglas Alexander, 55, of 2112 Eighth, were arraigned Monday before 60th District Judge Michael J. Nolan.

They are charged with embezzlement from a vulnerable adult of more than \$1,000 but less than \$20,000. The offense is a five-year felony.

Muskegon Heights Detective Calvin Mahan said the husband and wife had been caring for his mother in their home for about 11/2 years. The mother has a debilitating disease.

"During that time, they went through about \$40,000 of her money," Mahan said. The money was allegedly used for other purposes than the mother's care, according to police.

The couple's attorney, John R. Beason of Grand Rapids, was in court this morning and could not be reached for comment.

The mother has since been placed in a nursing home, Mahan said.

The Alexanders each posted a \$10,000 surety bond and preliminary examination was set for May 16.

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May 5, 2008

Ingham County Democrats support health-care petition drive

Ngan Kim Nguyen
Reader Submitted

The Ingham County Democratic Party hosted the Ingham County Health Care Petition Action Day on Saturday, May 3, in support of the Health Care for Michigan Campaign.

About two-dozen volunteers participated in the event and collected more than 500 signatures. Volunteers chose to either collect signatures door-to-door at local events and other venues such as Diversity Day, Mason Spring Fling, the Lansing City Market and the Meridian Farmers Market.

"We are endorsing the health care proposal because we believe all Michigan residents deserve access to affordable health care," Penelope Tsernoglou, Ingham County Democratic Party 3rd Vice Chair and organizer of Saturday's petition drive, said.

The Health Care for Michigan Campaign is a statewide coalition of student, senior citizen, community, religious, union, and medical groups in favor of health care reform. The coalition is concerned with the skyrocketing costs associated with health care and the strain these costs are to both families and businesses.

Michigan is spending about \$60 billion every year on health care, about \$6,000 per-person per-year. Still, more than a million Michigan residents have no health insurance and hundreds of thousands lack enough health coverage to pay for serious illness and injury.

The Health Care for Michigan Campaign has been circulating a petition requiring lawmakers to pass legislation providing all Michigan residents access to health care. The group is trying to get the 475,000 signatures required to get the proposal on the November ballot. More than 100,000 signatures have been collected thus far.

If voters approve the proposal in November, it will amend the Michigan Constitution and will require the State Legislature to control the skyrocketing cost of health care and provide health care for those currently without coverage.

FROM OUR READERS

For people and business, fix health care

MAY 8, 2008

A single-payer, universal health care plan would benefit employers and taxpayers.

- It would level the playing field for U.S. manufacturers who are forced to compete with businesses in other countries that do not pay for employee health care.
- While the initial federal tax to fund the system would increase taxes, state and local property taxes would decrease by billions of dollars as government employees and teachers are added to the new system.
- Third, a medical identification card would be proof to all employers that job applicants are U.S. citizens or legal residents.

Every other major manufacturing country has some form of universal health care; it's time for the U.S. electorate to demand nothing less.

John Quay

Redford

Legislative inaction

Most Americans agree that the uninsured are a clear problem. Too many citizens have no access to health care or face bankruptcy if injured or seriously ill.

It's a sad statement that local churches need to kick off a drive to put the issue on the ballot next fall just to force legislators to come up with a solution. Michigan's leaders should take note of other states that have come up with solutions, such as Massachusetts, and get together on a plan.

John C. Bernia Jr.

Oxford



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Letter carriers to collect food for the hungry

Thursday, May 08, 2008

BY CHRIS KILLIAN

Special to the Gazette

KALAMAZOO -- Letter carriers in the area will be picking up more than just outgoing mail Saturday as they join colleagues across the country in Stamp Out Hunger.

Residents can do their part, meanwhile, by placing food donations by their mailboxes.

From South Haven to Sturgis to Allegan, 14 offices from the region will be participating in the annual program, sponsored by the National Association of Letter Carriers. They have a goal of collecting 100,000 pounds of food, which is distributed to area shelters and emergency food pantries, said Mark Harrington, a letter carrier from Kalamazoo's Miller Road post office and president of Chapter 246 of the National Association of Letter Carriers.

"We need to help out," Harrington said. "There are a lot of hungry folks out there."

The number of area post offices helping out this year is up from 2007, Harrington said, with locations that have never participated in the program -- such as Hartford and Three Rivers -- joining in.

Since it began in 1993, the largest single-day food drive in the nation has collected more than 765 million pounds of food. Last year, local letter carriers collected 90,000 pounds of food, with 70 million pounds collected nationally.

People can leave a sturdy bag -- preferably with a handle -- containing nonperishable food, such as canned soup and vegetables, pasta, rice or cereal next to their mailboxes before the time of regular mail delivery Saturday.

Food items should be in nonbreakable containers, such as boxes and cans. Letter carriers will deliver the food to regional food banks that distribute to local pantries, shelters and soup kitchens.

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Letter carriers want to stamp out hunger

National Food drive is Saturday

By Catherine Kavanaugh
Daily Tribune Staff Writer

Letter carriers across south Oakland County will make special deliveries Saturday of nonperishable food to a barren food pantry in Royal Oak, local churches and other nonprofit groups in need.

Postal workers are asking residents to leave boxes and cans of food -- no glass -- in a bag by their mailbox as part of the 16th annual Stamp Out Hunger program. They will pick up the donations as they drop off mail and then take the goods to places like the Salvation Army pantry in Royal Oak.

Fred Whisnant, one of the organizers, said the U.S. Post Office wants to push the envelope this year and deliver more than the 71 million tons of food picked up in 2007.

"Every year we try to collect more food and it's especially important this year with rising cost of gasoline shooting up the prices of everything," Whisnant said.

Whisnant, a Harper Woods resident with a postal route in Royal Oak, said last year residents in Royal Oak, Madison Heights, Berkley, Pleasant Ridge and Huntington Woods donated 21 tons of food that went to the Salvation Army pantry. That was an increase from 17 tons in 2006.

"We'll try to beat that again," Whisnant added. "And thanks in advance to the people of this area for supporting us."

Stamp Out Hunger is the largest one-day food drive in the United States. Organizers say it has become an icon in the effort to fight hunger throughout the country.

"It is the one day that every American has the opportunity -- with the help of their letter carrier -- to donate food to the needy in their community," according to William H. Young, president of the National Association of Letter Carriers.

His goal is to hit the 100 ton mark one day as more Americans choose between paying for rent, utilities, medicine and groceries. In the last year, the number of U.S. residents struggling to put food on the table increased from 35.1 million people to 35.5 million.

The statistic comes from the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, which also says one out of six children don't know where they will find their next meal.

Major Glen Caddy of the Salvation Army, Royal Oak Citadel, said demand for children's favorite food increases every summer when school lets out and free lunch programs end. The items in biggest demand include anything with

protein, such as peanut butter, canned meats and soups, as well as cereal and pasta, including macaroni and cheese.

Contact Catherine Kavanaugh at cathy.kavanaugh@dailytribune.com or (248) 591-2504.

Click here to return to story:

http://www.dailytribune.com/stories/050808/loc_localn03.shtml



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Take the opportunity to donate food Saturday

Wednesday, May 07, 2008

Michigan residents are being squeezed between an abysmal job market, deflating home values and skyrocketing food and fuel prices.

Is it any wonder food pantries and soup kitchens are seeing their cupboards go bare earlier as the demand for food assistance goes up?

But there are plenty of ways to help for those who, even though they are pinched by the economy, aren't having to choose between buying groceries and paying the rent.

Last weekend, the local annual CROP Walk, which since 1977 has been raising funds to feed the hungry, raised \$38,418 in pledges, of which 25 percent will go to local area shelters and emergency food pantries. The remainder will be distributed around the world by Church World Services for food assistance programs.

And on Saturday, U.S. Postal Service letter-carriers from 14 offices around southwestern Michigan will be collecting food donations from homes during their delivery rounds.

The goal is to collect 100,000 pounds of food. Last year, the 15th year of the "Stamp Out Hunger" food drive, local letter-carriers collected 90,000 pounds of food for local food pantries, homeless shelters and soup kitchens and regional food banks.

Kalamazoo Loaves and Fishes, the Portage Outreach Center and the Salvation Army have benefited from the volunteer work of the letter-carriers and the generosity of residents in southwestern Michigan.

The federal government estimates that about 11 percent of the population in the United States either goes hungry frequently or are "food insecure," in other words, they don't always know when or what their next meal will be. Or they can't afford high-quality food. Judging by the number of people wearing work uniforms who get food from soup kitchens, food agencies know that a great number of people who seek food assistance are employed.

Those who missed out on contributing to the CROP Walk last weekend will have another opportunity on Saturday to help keep emergency food pantries full this year.

To contribute to the Stamp Out Hunger food drive, leave a sturdy bag of non-perishable food in non-breakable containers near your mailbox on Saturday.

Every food item donated helps emergency food agencies stay ahead of the demand.

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More food, please

[Jackson Citizen Patriot](#) May 08, 2008 09:37AM

The following is a [Jackson Citizen Patriot](#) editorial for May 8:

It can't be said enough that local food pantries have a huge need this year to help struggling families put food on their tables. On Saturday, the community gets another chance to show its generosity.

U.S. Postal Service letter carriers will be collecting nonperishable food through their 16th annual drive. The donations go to the Salvation Army and then to roughly a dozen pantries in the area.

It's one of the area's largest drives. Residents put some 44,000 pounds of food by their mailboxes or on their front porches for this collection last year. That's a huge boost to pantries that might start to run low on food as the summer starts.

Curiously, the cans and boxes of items you'll donate Saturday are not the most valuable donation you can make to pantries. Money donations actually go further because pantries can buy food at 18 cents a pound from the Food Bank of South Central Michigan.

Will anyone complain when you donate food items this weekend or at any time through the year? Not at all. Any charity is meaningful, particularly at a time when so many people need so much.

Jackson residents have given a lot to keep pantries' shelves full. Now, this weekend, take another look at your own shelves and wallets. Can you give more?

Church helps mothers in need

By Elizabeth A. Katz
Daily Tribune Staff Writer

CLAWSON -- In celebration of motherhood, the Clawson United Methodist Church is displaying layettes it plans to distribute to new mothers in need.

It's a Mother's Day tradition at the church, where layettes will be on display from 9:30-11 a.m. this Sunday at the church, 205 N. Main Street.

"We always have them on display Mother's Day," said Jean Isaacson, a layette program volunteer and church member for more than 50 years. Isaacson has been involved all 30 years of the project.

"Everyone who is on the receiving end is thrilled," she said.

The layettes are gift boxes containing baby items for a new mother who cannot afford to take her newborn home in a new outfit. They contain diapers, a bottle, two onesies, a blanket and several sets of clothing. Items are donated and earlier this year, the City of Clawson contributed \$1,025 from its "Casual Day" fund to the program. Employees who choose to dress casually on Friday have \$2.50 deducted from their paycheck, which goes to fund charitable projects in the community. Past projects Clawson has funded include HAVEN, Gilda's Club and the Adopt A Soldier project.

"It was marvelous," Isaacson said about Clawson's contribution.

Money will go to purchase baby bottles and diapers since so many people really enjoy purchasing outfits for the layettes.

Last year, the church gave away 225 layettes to Providence and Beaumont hospitals. From there, the hospitals distribute the layettes to human services agencies in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties. Isaacson said that most layettes go to moms in Macomb County.

Isaacson expects to have more layettes on display than last year. Over the last 30 years, she estimates the program has distributed between 3,500 to 4,000 layettes. Though Isaacson and her volunteers do not see the mothers who receive the gifts, they are pleased they go to help a newborn baby.

"I'm thrilled to know a baby is going home in a brand new outfit," she said. "Everybody loves babies."

To make a donation to the Clawson United Methodist Church's layette program, call (248) 435-9090.



REPORT NO. 89, VOLUME 47-- WEDNESDAY, MAY 7 2008

SUPREME COURT SAYS VOTER INTENT CLEAR IN BARRING PARTNER BENEFITS

The intent of voters to prohibit public entities from offering health insurance or other benefits to employees' same-sex partners could not have been more clear when a 58 percent majority adopted the marriage amendment in 2004, a 5-2 majority of the Supreme Court ruled Wednesday. The ACLU of Michigan quickly said it would work with schools, local governments and others interested in using criteria that the decision permits in order to provide benefits.

The University of Michigan, Michigan State University and the city of Kalamazoo are among several public bodies which have adopted benefits policies that do not rely on a partner relationship, but cover other criteria such as sharing finances, living in the same household for a specific time and being unmarried.

The court, affirming the Court of Appeals and a ruling by [Attorney General Mike Cox](#), said the language in the amendment to only recognize a union between one man and one woman as a marriage "or similar union for any purpose" unquestionably bans partner benefits when based on the relationship of the employee to the partner.

Debate had raged during the election as to the meaning of the language, with some proponents of the marriage amendment arguing it was limited to marriage and opponents warning it had wider consequences. At the time, the city of Kalamazoo had already extended benefits to same-sex partners, and several universities were adopting plans as well.

A negotiated state contract with the UAW 6000 to provide such benefits for its employees was put on ice as well after the election, pending a legal resolution to the dispute, and it now becomes history.

Although the supporters of those partner benefit provisions argued the amendment spoke directly only to recognition of marriages, the Supreme Court said, "The pertinent question is not whether public employers are recognizing a domestic partnership as a marriage or whether they have declared a domestic partnership to be a marriage or something similar to marriage; rather, it is whether the public employers are recognizing a domestic partnership as a union similar to a marriage."

The opinion by Justice Stephen Markman said marriages and domestic partnerships are the only relationships defined in terms of both gender and lack of close blood connection, and thus partnerships are unions similar to marriage. "When public employers provide domestic partners health-insurance benefits on the basis of the domestic partnership, they are without a doubt recognizing the partnership," the court said.

"Whether the language 'for any purpose' is essential to reach the conclusion that health-insurance benefits cannot be provided under the instant circumstances, or merely punctuates what is otherwise made clear in the amendment, the people of this state could hardly have made their intentions clearer," Mr. Markman wrote (*National Pride At Work v. Governor*, [SC docket No. 133429](#)).

He dismissed campaign literature from the group promoting the amendment that benefits would not be affected as inapt given the clarity of the language in the amendment.

The opinion was signed by Chief Justice Clifford Taylor and Justices Elizabeth Weaver, Maura Corrigan and Robert Young Jr.

Dissenting Justice Marilyn Kelly, who was joined by Justice Michael Cavanagh, said the majority's ruling to exclude consideration of the campaign brochure, web site statements and other information condones campaign mischief. Partly because of that, they argued the intent of voters was not clear.

"For a union to be similar to marriage, it must mirror more than the manner in which the private bond is recognized. It must also carry with it comparable benefits, rights, and responsibilities," the dissent said. "The employer benefit programs at issue do not grant same-sex couples the rights, responsibilities, or benefits of marriage."

"The health coverage at issue is a benefit of employment. And the fact that the coverage is conferred on the employee's significant other does not transform it into a benefit of marriage; the coverage is also conferred on other dependents, such as children."

ACLU Executive Director Kary Moss called the decision "flawed and unfortunate" because it ignored the statements by proponents during the

campaign about the limited intent of the amendment and potentially serious consequences to many families who had relied on partner health benefits.

"This adds to the numbers of all of those without health insurance," she said. "What this is going to do is take away to a large degree benefits to children of partners."

The opinion did not address whether children of partners would be affected, but the ACLU and some parents who had been receiving benefits said it raises substantial concerns.

Tom Patrick, who has relied on benefits provided through his partner's coverage at Eastern Michigan University, said healthcare for the five children the two foster parents have is in jeopardy. "It really disheartens me because our goal was to take care of these children," he said. "The alternative is to pay the benefits out of pocket or go back to work full time which would harm our family."

Jay Kaplan, ACLU of Michigan LGBT staff attorney, said the organization would be working with other groups nationally to determine whether to pursue further legal action federal courts. But at the least, he said the decision is a warning shot to other states which may face similar proposals. While Ms. Moss said the ACLU will encourage other public employers - and [Governor Jennifer Granholm](#) - to craft similar criteria and that they understand the opinion, she said it is "not a panacea. It is one way to ensure people keep insurance, but it is not a solution for everyone."

A spokesperson for Mr. Cox said the opinion upholds both the institution of marriage and the rights of voters who approved the amendment. "Public employers can confer a benefit on public employees," said Rusty Hills. "What was sought in this case was to extend those same benefits in lieu of marriage and that's what the amendment precludes, pretty clearly."

Ms. Granholm is disappointed with the ruling, said spokesperson Liz Boyd. She said the office needs more time to review the decision before commenting in more detail or assessing what other options are open to public employers.

"We're disappointed with the ruling, but we're not surprised given the track record of the court," she said.



May 8, 2008

Same-sex benefits ruling might have minimal effect

Many packages already reworded to blunt state Supreme Court ruling

Christine Rook
Lansing State Journal

A potentially devastating ruling Wednesday by Michigan's high court about same-sex benefits is likely to have little local effect.

That's because months ago many Lansing officials began rewording their domestic partner benefits packages. The concern at the time was that the Michigan Supreme Court would view a 2004 ban on gay marriage as also blocking public employers from offering health insurance to same-sex partners.

That very ruling came down from the court on Wednesday in a 5-2 decision.

"In some ways this is an expected decision," said Grant Littke, president of the Gay and Lesbian Faculty and Staff Association at Michigan State University.

His organization has worked with MSU to revise benefits so they are not offered to same-sex partners but to "other eligible individuals."

Ingham County government officials have done the same, dropping "same-sex" and adopting the wording "other qualified adult."

"Everybody should have insurance," said Matthew Myers, the county's controller/administrator. "Without insurance there are going to be some folks left behind. What are they supposed to do?"

The court's decision upheld a state Court of Appeals ruling that a ban on gay marriage should prevent publicly funded agencies from offering same-sex benefits.

The American Family Association of Michigan was pleased with the court's ruling Wednesday. Group President Gary Glenn stressed that the court didn't decide against providing health care to homosexual partners. It simply upheld the idea that a same-sex partnership is not equal in stature to a marriage.

Asked whether the association would pursue laws preventing homosexual partners from obtaining benefits, Glenn said: "We would support legislation that limited public employer benefits to between a man and a woman."

The American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan blasted the ruling.

"This is a flawed and unfortunate decision," said Kary Moss, the Michigan group's executive director. "The majority opinion ignored the multiple statements made during the ballot initiative campaign by its supporters that they did not intend to take away health care from families and children."

The ACLU promised to work with organizations to revamp the wording in their benefits eligibility listings. Up to 20 public universities, community colleges, school districts and local governments in Michigan have benefits policies covering at least 375 gay couples.

Lansing Community College officials still were trying to fully understand the court's ruling Wednesday, as were administrators at MSU.

"We have not yet read the ruling," said Terry Denbow, MSU's vice president for university relations. "We expect to be able to comment after we have the opportunity to thoroughly review and analyze it."

In a February 2007 news release provided by MSU, the university stated how it values all of its faculty and staff and that "we will do all that we can to maintain access to health care for our eligible employees and their families."

Littke noted there are only about 10 employees who appear to tap the health benefits via the "other eligible individual" tag, and that despite the small number such access is of great importance.

"It would be a clear signal," he said, "that our families are not valued in the way that families are, who are eligible to be married."

The Associated Press contributed to this report. Contact Christine Rook at 377-1261 or clrook@lsj.com.
